



**INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION**  
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Permanent Observer**

Third Committee of the General Assembly  
Item 71 (a): Implementation of Human Rights Instruments

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Madam Chair,

On any subject, the work of parliament, in particular its legislative work, has a direct or indirect impact on the ability of the people effectively to enjoy their fundamental rights. In order for these rights to be given their due, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) encourages parliaments to establish bodies to deal specifically with human rights. The surveys the IPU has carried out since 1993 indicate that an increasing number of parliaments have done so in recent years. The latest edition of the World Directory of Parliamentary Human Rights Bodies, published in 2004, provides detailed information on this subject. This information also appears in the IPU's database on parliaments, PARLINE, where it is regularly updated.

The terms of reference and functioning of parliamentary human rights bodies varies considerably, which of course has consequences for the effectiveness and impact of their human rights work. In order to discuss these questions, in March 2004 the IPU, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), held a seminar for members of such bodies. This provided an opportunity to raise the question of their cooperation with regional and international human rights mechanisms, in particular the treaty bodies. The discussions showed that many such bodies had no relations with the mechanisms, were not informed of their work by their governments or by the treaty bodies or other mechanisms themselves and, in some cases, were not even aware of their existence.

The same is true for special rapporteurs. Of course, many of the recommendations made in particular by the treaty bodies require parliamentary action in the form of legislation or oversight of the executive, so this lack of knowledge does nothing to strengthen the effectiveness of such bodies, or of the parliamentary bodies, for that matter.

We can cite a model: the South African parliamentary committee that deals with the rights of the child demands that all of the country reports submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child be presented to it, and it debates them. It ensures that the reports reflect all points of view, and specifically those of civil society. It holds public debates and hearings, summons government ministers and requests the relevant information and documentation. Members of the Committee are included in the country's delegation to the sessions of the United Nations treaty body, so that they have a better understanding of the reasoning behind the recommendations it issues, and they share their views

with it. Lastly, the Committee plays an active role by ensuring the follow-up and implementation of the recommendations issued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, making use of the entire palette of oversight instruments available to parliaments.

The IPU is convinced that all regional and international human rights mechanisms, and especially treaty bodies and special rapporteurs, have a great deal to gain from cooperating more closely with parliamentary human rights bodies, and where there are none, with the competent parliamentary committees. The IPU therefore is working to establish or strengthen such cooperation by various means, including by holding regular seminars and publishing a series of handbooks for parliamentarians.

The latter, which already included several handbooks on human rights, including the rights of the child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, has recently had a new addition, as the IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have just published a new, comprehensive handbook for parliamentarians on human rights. Its aim is to familiarize parliamentarians with the framework established since 1945 by the United Nations and regional organizations to promote and protect human rights. The handbook presents the concept of human rights and the content of the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It explains the obligations of States in protecting and promoting these rights and suggests measures for parliaments and parliamentarians to take to contribute to their realization. It is of course our hope that this handbook will help make parliaments more aware of human rights and their States' obligations in this field. But we also hope that it will prompt United Nations mechanisms and procedures to associate parliaments more closely in their work.

Thank you.